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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2149
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2429
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 000542

SIPDIS

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EMBASSY KUWAIT AND NEA STAFF ASSISTANT: PLEASE PASS TO A/S
WELCH
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2018
TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#)
IS, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANON: TOUR OF THE BLUE LINE; UNIFIL COMMANDER'S
BIG THREE; DEMINING

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On April 19, Charge and Defense Attaché toured the Blue Line in a UNIFIL helicopter, overflying Sheba'a farms and Ghajar and met at length with UNIFIL Commander Graziano. General Graziano continues to stress that Ghajar is his number one issue, predicting that this issue will lead to armed conflict by October if it is not resolved. Graziano has developed a detailed UNIFIL plan for Ghajar that has been approved by Prime Minister Siniora. He will present this plan to Israel no later than the May 5 Tripartite (UNIFIL-Lebanon Armed Forces-Israeli Defense Forces) meeting. Graziano continues to press his Israeli interlocutors for additional cluster bomb strike data from the summer 2006 Israel-Hizballah war. The information provided thus far has allowed limited progress in humanitarian demining efforts, he said. Specifically, he needs strike data in the "Kosovo format." Graziano is concerned that Israeli overflights undermine UNIFIL and are continuing to increase each month. According to UNIFIL radar printouts, there were 692 overflights in March 2008. As of April 19, there have been 492 overflights for the month of April. Charge and DATT also observed U.S.-funded demining activities in South Lebanon and met with UN and LAF staff at the Tyre UN Mine Action Coordination Center. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Charge, accompanied by DATT, met with UNIFIL Commander Major General Claudio Graziano in his office in Naqoura on April 19. Graziano offered up the use of his helicopter for the day to facilitate visits to cluster bomb destruction sites, a complete tour of the Blue Line, Sheba'a Farms, and the length of the Litani river that is in the UNIFIL area of operations (AO).

MY MAIN FOCUS IS GHAJAR
THIS ISSUE IS "BOILING"

¶13. (C) Graziano opened the meeting by saying, "my main focus is still Ghajar." Describing the issue as "boiling," Graziano predicted this issue will lead to armed conflict in October if it is not addressed, saying, "if Israel does not leave, it will be war over this permanent occupation." Graziano feels that this issue is not currently the GOL's main focus because of the ongoing political stalemate over the Presidency. Once there is a President in place and politicians turn their attention to Ghajar with "tough comments," Graziano fears that the Israelis will not be able to withdraw from Ghajar for domestic political considerations if this happens.

¶14. (C) Graziano expressed bewilderment at the Israeli refusal to withdraw from Ghajar. He recalled that Israel evacuated northern Ghajar when the Israelis withdrew from south Lebanon in 2006 and that it posed no problem for them when Hizballah occupied northern Ghajar. According to Graziano, Hizballah is able to use the previous Israeli withdrawal as proof of Hizballah's superior abilities to liberate south Lebanon. "Since the LAF has been in south Lebanon, they have not been able to accomplish the task of regaining control of northern Ghajar," said Graziano.

¶15. (C) Graziano believes that the Israelis fear Ghajar will establish a model for Sheba'a Farms. He made sure we understood that the Israelis have not told him this, but that this is his own analysis. Graziano does not think the two issues have anything in common as there are completely different circumstances surrounding each. Graziano does think he has sensed some movement from the Israeli Foreign Minister on the issue of Ghajar, but that the Ministry of Defense remains firmly opposed. Graziano told us that the Israelis are starting to discuss timelines for withdrawal, indicating that they see the withdrawal as something they

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must do.

NEW UNIFIL PLAN IS APPROVED BY SINIORA
WILL BE PRESENTED TO IDF IN THE COMING WEEKS

¶16. (C) Graziano outlined the UNIFIL proposal for Israeli withdrawal from Ghajar. He told us that he has briefed this plan to PM Siniora and Siniora has agreed to this plan. Siniora's liaison officer to UNIFIL, BG Abdulruhman Shehaitly, is to send a letter to Graziano confirming the Lebanese Government's acceptance of this proposal. (Note: Shehaitly is LAF's authority responsible for all issues related to UNIFIL and Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.) Graziano will deliver this proposal to the IDF in the coming weeks, but no later than the May 5 Tripartite meeting. Graziano said he does not see how the Israeli side can refuse this plan as it addresses all of the concerns they have presented thus far. However, he expects further delays from Israel.

¶17. (SBU) The UNIFIL plan was given to Charge in written form. The exact text is as follows:

BEGIN TEXT:

New Proposal on northern Ghajar

Basic Premise: same procedure as IDF withdrawal from rest of Lebanon

- Full withdrawal of the IDF from area 14B. (Note: this area includes Ghajar)
- UNIFIL to verify that there is no IDF presence north of the Blue Line
- Deployment of UNIFIL in the area 14B up to the Blue Line
- The LAF to have one liaison officer collocated with UNIFIL in the area
- The Lebanese authorities to undertake with UNIFIL not to

deploy in the area 14B without the agreement of the United Nations

- There would be no deadline for the handover of the area to the Lebanese authorities
- UN to determine the hand-over date in consultation with both parties

END TEXT

STRATEGIC REVIEW WITH THE LEBANESE ARMY
A WAY TO HELP THE LAF BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE

¶ 18. (C) Charge asked about Italian PM-elect Berlusconi's recent comments to the media regarding Italy's intentions to "take a careful look" at the rules of engagement (ROE) of Italian troops on the UNIFIL mission. Graziano, while noting that he was in the UNIFIL commander position and thus not speaking for Italy, noted that the ROE are decided by the UN -- and that he would be the action officer tapped to make such a decision. Because any change to the ROE requires the accord of all UNIFIL troop-contributing countries, Graziano described the chances of such amendment to the ROE as "nil."

¶ 19. (C) On April 11, LAF Commander General Sleiman and Graziano held their first "Strategic Review" to discuss matters of mutual concern. Graziano told us that the LAF considers themselves to be without a government, no Parliament, and no President. As such, they are looking for political cover for any actions they want to undertake in the south. Graziano seemed comfortable using UNIFIL as this political cover for "pushing" the LAF to do more in the south to eliminate armed elements operating south of the Litani River.

¶ 110. (C) During the Strategic Review, Graziano and Sleiman agreed to conduct more coordinated activities with three focus areas. The first area would be control of the Blue Line. The second focus area is being able to shut down all

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crossing areas on the Litani River. While there are six principal crossing points, there are over sixty other crossing points that use footbridges or are fordable by four wheel drive vehicles. The third, and most important, aspect according to Graziano, is controlling areas that he characterized as "hot spots." The hot spots include any area that has been used to launch rockets against Israel before. At this time, UNIFIL and the LAF conduct ten counter-rocket launching operations (CRLOs) each day: five during the day, and five at night. During the CRLOs, every vehicle and person are stopped and searched for unauthorized items.

¶ 111. (C) Graziano told us he was "almost ready" to tell the Israelis that there is no more movement of weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations. He assesses that the LAF is taken stronger actions and that Hizballah is not challenging the LAF in order to gain international legitimacy. Graziano further assesses that Hizballah cannot attack UNIFIL for fear of being labeled a terrorist group by all of Europe. In fact, Graziano said, Hizballah "wants to be a good boy so they can get support from the Christians." Even so, Graziano said this could all change in twenty-four hours if events flare up elsewhere in the region, specifically citing events associated with Gaza, retaliation for Imad Mugniyah's assassination, or Iran's nuclear weapons program.

¶ 112. (C) This first Strategic Review produced a statement of tactical and logistical needs for the LAF, said Graziano. Sleiman agreed to have regular reviews every three to four months, but these will most likely occur at a lower echelon of leadership. Graziano wants to use these reviews to push the LAF to do more in the south in advance of the next UNSYG report. While the LAF is "tired" and has a manpower problem, Graziano feels the LAF is doing much more to counter Hizballah influence in the south even though Hizballah pays

its "reservists" more than LAF soldiers are paid. Graziano thinks the issue of pay for the soldiers would be a good way to pull young men from the south away from Hizballah.

OVERFLIGHT ARE INCREASING
THERE WERE 72 OVERFLIGHTS ON 17 APRIL 2008

¶13. (SBU) According to Graziano, the issue of Israeli overflights continues to undermine UNIFIL every day. Acknowledging that overflights have intelligence value, he said there is no way any army, anywhere in world, needs 72 overflights in a single day. Graziano's aide, Colonel Masiello, showed Charge radar print-outs of the Israel overflights that had occurred by ten o'clock that morning. UNIFIL uses the radars on the Maritime Task Force and the radars from six French MISTRAL anti-aircraft missile batteries to track Israeli overflights. Graziano told us that the overflights were increasing exponentially. According to UNIFIL radar reports, there were 282 overflights in February 2008, 692 overflights in March 2008, and there were already 492 overflights as of April 19, 2008.

¶14. (C) Graziano characterized the overflights as a type of "dialogue" between Israel and Hizballah. Specifically, Graziano pointed out that a large number of the overflights were over Nabatiyye. "If you have anything in Nabatiyye, sell it," he quipped.

¶15. (SBU) In the end, Graziano told us that "the problem is that such a huge number of overflights is hard to explain." When Hizballah was in control of south Lebanon, it was rare to see more than five or six overflights per week; a very active week would have been ten or twelve overflights. Seventy-two in one day "has no tactical value," according to Graziano.

CLUSTER BOMB STRIKE DATA PROVIDED IS INSUFFICIENT;
EXPECT VERY STRONG LANGUAGE IN NEXT UNSYG REPORT

¶16. (SBU) Charge attended a briefing with the United Nations
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Mine Action Coordination Center (UNMACC) in Tyre and subsequently visited a live fire demolition site on the edge of an orange orchard in the village of Al-Malikiyye. A live cluster munitions had been located the previous day on the edge of the orchard by UNMACC personnel, in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces Mine Action Center (LMAC). The Charge's visit to UNMACC-TYRE and the humanitarian explosive remnants of war clearance program received extensive coverage in the Arabic language media. According to GOL statistics, 26% of Lebanon's farmland remains affected by the explosive remnants of war, including South Lebanon's most fertile citrus, tobacco, olive, and banana-growing areas.

¶17. (C) UNMACC personnel told us that the strike data provided by the Israelis was of little use for humanitarian demining as it contained no precise data; rather, it contains a statistical probability of how many munitions might be found in a ten kilometer by ten kilometer square. Graziano told us that he is not satisfied with this data and that this lack of information continues to have major impact on the agriculture sector in south Lebanon. In coordination with LMAC and UNMACC, UNIFIL is also working to help clear the cluster munitions as quickly as possible, but it is impossible to know, "where to start." Specifically, Graziano asked that cluster munitions strike data should be provided using the "Kosovo standard" for strike data. Graziano told us that there will be much stronger language in the next UNSYG report on cluster munitions in an effort to get the Israelis to be more forthcoming. Expressing some trepidation, Graziano told us that he fears the data may not exist and that the Israelis may have fired "indiscriminately" during the last forty-eight hours of the war. "This would be bad for them if

this is the case and this becomes known," he added.
SISON